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NGOS IN THE PUBLIC EYE INTRODUCTION

The public image and credibility of NGOs directly influence their ability to attract new members and volunteers, get public support and raise funds. Therefore, it is extremely important for the sustainability of the NGO sector that the general public, business sector and state institutions understand NGOs' role in society.

One of the goals of AED's CroNGO Program is to initiate and encourage discussion on how to improve the public perception of NGOs. AED believed that the appropriate first step was to obtain concrete data on this issue to guide future programming initiatives. For this purpose, in July 2005, we commissioned the Ivo Pilar Institute to conduct a survey on the public perception of NGOs with the aim of collecting data on attitudes towards NGOs and other important civil society related issues.

The complete report from this research, including the data collected, is available on AED's web site. In this issue of the newsletter, in addition to presenting the research findings, we also wanted to provide analysis and commentary on some of the most interesting results, with the help of several prominent representatives of civil society: Toni Gabrić, editor-in-chief of the independent Internet portal H-Alter, offers his general thoughts on the research; GONG and B.a.B.e. describe their approach to the media and public relations strategies, which helped them emerge as two of the most frequently mentioned NGOs in the survey; and Sandra Ražnatović from Fade In explains how NGOs should present themselves on television.

RESEARCH AND MAIN FINDINGS

The research was conducted on a nationally representative sample of 1,008 respondents, using face-to-face interviews, by experts from the Ivo Pilar Institute, led by Renata Franc, Ph.D. To date, it is the most extensive quantitative research into the public perception of NGOs in Croatia. In contrast to several previous surveys (GfK 2002, Puls 2003), it was carried out through field work, as opposed to phone interviews. In addition to measuring the level of information the public has about NGOs, the research was also able to determine how citizens participate in NGO activities and how willing they are to support these activities either through volunteer work, donations or petition-signing.

Results show that a large majority of Croatian citizens (83.3%) are familiar with the term "NGO", although less than half (43.3%) claim to know its meaning and understand what NGOs really do.

The most visible NGOs in Croatia are those dealing with war veterans and environmental issues, followed by consumer protection, human rights and gender equality groups, which implies that, in general, the more visible NGOs are those that engage in active advocacy for specific changes in society. Relatively less visible NGOs are those dealing with national minority issues, development of civil society, unemployed persons, art and culture, education and religion and religious freedoms.

Regarding respondents' socio-economic indicators, younger and middle-aged men with a higher level of education and living

in more urban areas expressed the greatest knowledge about NGOs. It is interesting that in terms of political orientation and religion, there are no simple divisions. Citizens to whom religion is less important or unimportant and whose political orientation leans to the left are more familiar with the term "NGO" and its meaning, whereas persons with more rightist political views express more positive attitudes towards them.

There is an encouraging positive trend in the public perception of NGOs. In comparison to similar research done by GfK in 2002, the percentage of citizens with a positive general attitude has increased from 61.2% to 73.2%, with a simultaneous decrease in those with neutral (from 31.5% to 21.2%) or negative attitudes (from 3.3% to 1.3%). Naturally, one has to be cautious when making such comparisons as these are two methodologically different surveys, but a particular trend is nevertheless apparent.

Although most citizens express positive attitudes towards NGOs, a certain amount of skepticism is still present. This might be one of the reasons that a relatively small number of them are personally involved in NGOs' activities, despite their general willingness to participate in such work.

Finally, the results indicate that citizens are more satisfied with the work NGOs are doing in raising awareness of human rights and developing civil society than with their contributions to solving more pressing social problems such as unemployment or economic development.

NOTE

These are only some highlights from the research. The complete report from the survey (in Croatian) is available on AED's web site at: <http://www.aed.hr/hr/publications.asp#surveys>. An English summary can be viewed at http://www.aed.hr/en/dokumenti/200601_public_summary.pdf

COMMENTARY ON THE SURVEY "PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF NGOS"

Toni Gabrić (www.h-alter.org)



Results of the research on public attitudes towards NGOs conducted in 2005 by the Ivo Pilar Institute as part of AED's CroNGO Program are somewhat surprising when compared to the prevailing negative public attitudes about NGOs in the 1990s, which resulted from a lack of democratic culture and government propaganda.

Even today, a certain amount of skepticism is still visible among the Croatian public: for example, 44% of citizens entirely or mostly agree with the claim that people active in NGOs are motivated by their personal interests, and 58% of respondents believe that NGOs serve the interests of their funders. This is probably still a remnant of propaganda from the 1990s, combined with the suppressed hostility of the government and part of the public which surfaced again towards the end of last year, after this research was completed. But, there are probably other explanations as well: work in NGOs (at least those that are part of “civil society”, which does not encompass only NGOs) is a form of political activity, and the premise of mature

It seems that not only has the public perception of NGOs changed, but that there is also a “pool of social capital” of undefined capacity, made up of individuals who perhaps want to actively engage in the non-governmental sector, but don’t know how to.

citizen awareness involves a methodic skepticism towards political activity as such - which does not mean rejecting or overlooking its importance and usefulness. This skepticism is further illustrated by the fact that two-thirds of respondents did not completely or mostly agree that most NGOs and their members are ethical and honest in managing the funds allocated to them. It would be interesting to further examine the basis and source of information that led to this doubt. Whether these opinions are the result of the echoes of accusations about “lost souls” and “Judah’s ducats” from 1990s or of a perception that, although relatively large funds from different sources are invested into NGOs, their impact on social change is small or non-existent (an opinion expressed by 60% of respondents) is an open question.

However, in spite of this skepticism, a surprisingly high percentage of respondents (almost four-fifths) have a generally positive attitude towards NGOs and their work. A large majority of them think that NGOs more or less contribute towards establishing “abstract” values such as democracy, raising public awareness of human rights, and developing civil society (although they are less likely to believe that NGOs can achieve “concrete” results, such as solving social problems or improving the quality of life). Almost half of respondents (between 43 and

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49%) think that NGOs should have significant public influence, and almost all of them think that their present influence is insufficient. More than half of respondents agree that the state should directly finance NGOs more than it does now, and two-thirds think that it should stimulate NGO work by exempting them from taxes.

This means that in Croatia today, the dominant attitude towards NGOs is positive, which is only partially challenged by the fact that some citizens explain their support with sympathies towards the humanitarian or sport activities of NGOs. But, research shows that the level of public understanding about NGOs’ work and the issues they deal with is low. Over 60% of respondents cite television as their main source of information about NGOs, while one-quarter refer to daily newspapers. However, content analysis of these media sources shows very low coverage of NGO-related topics. Half of respondents admit that they do not personally know anyone who is a member of an NGO, meaning that they do not get first-hand information about the non-governmental scene. In addition, it is obvious that most citizens are not active in the NGO sector because, apart from their unwillingness to set apart leisure time for such work, they do not have enough information about NGOs in their local community and do not know people who participate in such activities.

This means that if NGOs want to take advantage of these truly significant shifts in public opinion, they have two possibilities: a) more aggressive campaigns in the mainstream mass media, which some are already doing successfully; or b) developing independent media strategies to create “parallel realities”, address issues they consider relevant, “sensitize” the public (more precisely, to generate cases that will cause shifts in public awareness), and attract activists and supporters.

It seems that not only has the public perception of NGOs changed, but that there is also a “pool of social capital” of undefined capacity, made up of individuals who perhaps want to actively engage in the non-governmental sector, but don’t know how to. In general, mainstream media does not provide them with necessary information about the activities of the non-governmental scene, especially about how to actively engage in its work. However, due to the lack of other news media and a low level of understanding, most citizens still rely on TV and daily newspapers.

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Improving the NGO sector visibility in the public will probably depend on making the best of both possibilities.

MINORITY RIGHTS AND MAJORITY ISSUES

Darko Šeperić

Although the majority of the Croatian public views unemployment (69%), corruption (55%) and poverty (24%) as fundamental social problems, few citizens would contact and seek help from NGOs if affected by them (between 2 and 5%). Other issues about which citizens in general are reluctant to contact NGOs are violence and child abuse (in similar percentages). In contrast, as many as a third of all citizens would contact NGOs about environmental issues, which will be discussed in a separate article. Interestingly, a significant percentage of citizens would also contact NGOs about so-called “minority issues”.

About 20% of citizens would contact NGOs when faced with sexual orientation or gender equality issues. (Despite the fact that women make up the majority of the population, gender equality is treated as a minority issue because of certain parallels.) Fourteen percent (14%) of citizens would contact NGOs about national minority issues, which are, interestingly enough, considered serious social problems by the lowest number of citizens (about 10%), with one-third of all citizens not viewing them as a problem at all.

Without support from the state, there is not much NGOs can do to solve such complex and serious problems (as unemployment and corruption).

Dražen Lalić, Ph.D.

Regarding this gap between great public expectations about NGOs dealing with so-called minority issues and the low ranking of those issues on a scale of the most important social problems, a question arises: Are minority issues by nature a greater focus of civil society than majority issues, or is civil society equally adept at addressing the latter, but has failed to do so in Croatia to date?

Tin Gazivoda, temporary head of the Center for Human Rights, believes that civil society is equally capable of dealing with social problems such as unemployment and corruption, but the current situation is the result of a natural tendency of NGOs to work on what they know and can do best. So far, most human rights groups have mostly dealt with so-called first generation human rights, in other words, civil and political rights that protect the individual “against” the state. Second generation human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, are on the contrary “requested” by the individual “from” the state and are therefore harder to achieve. Individual NGOs such as the Croatian Helsinki Committee, says Gazivoda, have moved on and started addressing second generation human rights, but broader activities of civil society in this area are still limited by material and financial capacities. Minority rights as collective (as opposed to individual) rights are considered third generation

human rights. As all other collective rights, such as the right to peace and healthy environment, they are harder to achieve since they are granted neither “against” nor “from” the state.

However, since democracy can simply be described as “majority rule”, the concept of minority rights protection is of central importance to its functioning. Although minority rights, especially those of national, religious and cultural minorities, are widely accepted as basic human rights in democratic societies, their practical implementation and exercise faces many difficulties. This is why civil society demonstrates special interest in these issues and a large number of citizens view protection of minority rights as one of the areas which NGOs are most competent to address.

Dražen Lalić Ph.D., from the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb believes that NGOs should work more actively on those issues that citizens assess as important. Among the reasons he believes this has not happened to date are expectations of the public, the attitude of the government towards NGOs, as well as conformity and elitism of some NGO activists. Lalić claims that for a large number of citizens it seems natural that NGOs deal with less important issues, such as marginal groups, partly as a result of a socialist heritage that enforces the belief that the state is solely responsible for dealing with all important social issues. Moreover, the way the government treats NGOs contributes to such an authoritarian perspective - instead of encouraging partnership and cooperation with NGOs on the most acute social problems, the government perceives NGOs as separate and opposing entities. On the other hand, without support from the state, there is not much NGOs can do to solve such complex and serious problems. Citizens expect problems to be solved from the top, and the state supports this view, whereas for NGOs to take part in solving these problems it would be necessary to employ a bottom-up approach. As a positive example, Lalić cites the successful cooperation of local authorities and several NGOs in Split in solving the problem of drug abuse in the city. Finally, Lalić notes, there are NGO



Dražen Lalić, Ph. D.

activists who are complacent in the position they secured for themselves, and, as a means of least resistance, think that it is simpler and safer to deal with already familiar and well-trodden issues and problems.

Some of these opinions are shared by Jeniseja Fištrek, President of the Association of Unemployed Persons of Croatia, who considers the Government's unwillingness to cooperate as one of their biggest problems. "If the government and employers would accept us as an equal social partner representing a large social group, public perception would change as well, because citizens would realize that NGOs can do something about employment", says Fištrek. On the other hand, she emphasizes successful cooperation with the unions, which recognize their organization as a partner, and the media, which understand and support their work. While she admits that it is difficult to adequately address unemployment without cooperation with and support from the state, they are making progress in this area. Vocational

training and courses that are entered into the employment book encouraged about 20,000 people to begin actively searching for a job and about 1,000 persons have found work in the past five years as a result of direct mediation by the NGO.

But, in spite of the efforts of the Association of Unemployed Persons of Croatia, the disparity is still glaring. An NGO that deals with the most important social problem according to citizens and represents the interests of more than 300,000 citizens has only one full-time employee, while many NGOs dealing with minority issues have considerably more. It remains to be seen whether in the future NGOs will want to and be able to become a significant factor in solving pressing social problems such as unemployment and corruption, or if these attempts will remain isolated and sporadic, with civil society continuing to focus on what have been traditional issues for the last 15 years, such as humanitarian work, protection of civil, political and minority rights, and environmentalism.

VISIBILITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS

According to the research conducted by Ivo Pilar, the area of ecology and environment protection is ranked as the second most common area (after veterans of the Homeland War) in which respondents could name at least one NGO - 36.2% of respondents cited at least one NGO in this area, the most frequent of the 23 answers being simply "Green" (82%), then "Green Action" (3%), and NGO for Animal Protection (1%).

Interestingly, in spite of the high percentage, there is no organization called simply "Green", although there are at least 35 NGOs with that attribute in their titles. President of Green Action Jagoda Munić explained at the conference "NGOs in the Public Eye" that such a public perception is somewhat expected, as the media often uses the term "green" instead of the complete name of an organization when writing about the activities of environmental NGOs. She was also pleased by the fact that environment protection was so highly rated as an area in which citizens would contact NGOs, indicating that they think NGOs can contribute a lot in this area and that the environment is a value to be cherished.

When asked who they would contact about an environmental problem, most respondents indicated they would contact a green NGO (33.4%, which is at the same time the greatest percentage of citizens that would contact an NGO about any issue). "This shows that green NGOs are not only well-known and publicly recognized, but that people trust them", notes the lead researcher Renata Franc in the show "Civildreta" on Zagreb's Radio 101.

The high visibility of green NGOs is not surprising, since they are well-connected with similar organizations, scientists and experts in the region and the world, and were quick to recognize the benefits of media cooperation, leading to regular media coverage. Last year, the Druzba Adria Project was rejected

exactly three years after Croatia signed an agreement to join the initiative, largely due to the efforts of environmental activists, thereby marking one of the greatest victories of civil society to date. Although it might not look that way today, it is worth remembering that at the time the agreement was signed, but before the green NGOs reacted, most citizens were insufficiently informed about the project and its potential effects on Croatia. Through the controversy about the Druzba Adria Project, the issue of protection of the Adriatic Sea became one the most important issues in the 2004 presidential campaign.

Green NGOs have also carried out a series of other successful projects in recent times. Osječki Zeleni continued their campaign "Save Papuk", which is trying to prevent stone quarrying in Nature Park "Papuk" while citizens of the Zagreb district Travno protested against building a church on a large grass area in the center of the district and launched the initiative "Travno, My Neighborhood". Green Action is drawing public attention to the unsustainable use of natural resources caused by covering the coast with concrete and destroying green areas in cities, increased air pollution due to increased traffic, and lack of investments into public transport. Green NGOs also warn about overexploitation of ores and minerals, gravelling, building of forest roads and quarries without prior study of environmental effects, poaching and numerous other activities, increasing public concern for nature and environment and contributing to the better work of state institutions.

Green NGOs are not only well known and publicly recognized, but people trust them - every third citizen would contact an NGO about an environmental problem.

GREAT SUPPORT, SMALL MEMBERSHIP

It is difficult to speak generally about the non-governmental sector, because it is impossible to identify a common denominator for so many institutions and organizations with different goals, activities and structures. But, one thing is sure: all NGOs want their goals and ideas to be accepted by society, and their work to be recognizable and visible. The research done by Ivo Pilar Institute showed that respondents most easily recognize NGOs that promote general social values and ideas and work for the public benefit - the most visible NGOs are GONG, "Zeleni", HVIDRA, Caritas, Potrošač and so on. The research also shows that 73% of citizens support the activities of civil society organizations and consider their work very or somewhat useful for society. This shows a positive trend in citizen attitudes towards the work of NGOs - according to GfK research from 2002, 61% of citizens had a generally positive attitude towards them.

However, while the research indicates that nearly three-quarters of Croatian citizens express a positive attitude towards the work of NGOs, only 8.8% of respondents answered that they are members of at least one NGO. Prior research by Puls also showed a low percentage of membership in NGOs - merely 2% (2002) and 3% (2004). Having in mind that membership in NGOs is one of the best ways to show support for their work, the question is why don't NGOs have more members?

First, it should be noted that, according to the Law on Associations and in practice, NGOs do not need to have open membership.

Some NGOs have a closed membership, where members must be invited to join. However, NGOs dealing with general social problems such as environment protection, humanitarian work, etc. mostly keep their membership open to all citizens, and are at the same time the most widely recognized by citizens.

One of the questions in the research dealt with the reasons why respondents have not joined an NGO. The most frequently cited reasons were lack of information about NGOs active in their community (75%), lack of time (73%), the fact that they do not know anyone involved in such activities (67.7%), lack of interest (65.4%), and lack of trust in NGOs dealing with issues that are interesting to them (59%).

Berto Šalaj, M.Sc., from the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb believes that there is one additional reason explaining the relatively small membership in civil society organizations. In his opinion, data shows that citizens do not feel competent to work in NGOs. Šalaj claims that because subjective political competency in Croatia is generally low, citizens still do not participate in political processes. This passivity and feeling of inability to solve social problems is still present, and the non-governmental, civil sector, although it has become a political factor in most transitional countries, is still not as "close" to citizens as it is in Western countries.

CONFERENCE "NGOS IN THE PUBLIC EYE - PERCEPTION, CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES"

To disseminate the results of the survey of public perception of NGOs and stimulate discussion within the NGO sector on how to further improve public understanding of and involvement in their work, AED organized a conference titled "NGOs in the Public Eye - Perception, Challenges, Opportunities" on December 15, 2005. The conference gathered some 60 representatives of the media, NGOs, researchers and governmental institutions, and was moderated by Marina Škrabalo of MAP Consulting.

The main results of the survey were presented by the lead researcher, Renata Franc of the Ivo Pilar Institute, and then four leading Croatian experts on civil society and social capital issues commented on the significance of the findings. Dražen Lalić professor at the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb, brought attention to the discrepancy between the most serious problems identified in Croatian society (unemployment, corruption, poverty, crime, as well as drug addiction at the local level) and the small number of NGOs trying to resolve these issues. On a positive note, the research also shows that people are generally willing to help others (e.g., shop for their neighbors, lend money to a person in need, give someone a lift, donate clothes or furniture, take care of pets or assets), although they do not often label

it "volunteering". "It is encouraging", he concluded, "that the research proved that social capital in Croatia is still large".

Berto Šalaj, assistant at the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb, commented on the high percentage of citizens unfamiliar with the meaning of the terms "NGO" and "association". "This confirms the need for continued education of the general public

"It is encouraging that the research proved that social capital in Croatia is still large."

Berto Šalaj, M.Sc.



about the role that NGOs play in society”, he said. Mr. Šalaj also noted that although respondents generally believe they can better influence political decision-making processes as members of NGOs than as individuals, these percentages in both cases are discouragingly low.

Speaking from the perspective of an activist and sociologist, Suzana Kunac of B.a.B.e. stressed that it is hardly a surprise that the highest visibility is enjoyed by advocacy NGOs, particularly those who have been engaged in advocacy activities for years. Ms. Kunac also commented on the fact that television is the main source of information for the majority of citizens, and stressed that for many small NGOs, especially those dealing with local problems, getting air time, particularly on national television, is almost impossible. Gojko Bežovan of CERANEO shared his views on the CIVICUS research and its impact on the overall visibility of the sector.

In the discussion which followed, representatives of various NGOs shared their views about how to raise the profile of the sector among the general public. Among others, Sandra Pernar of GONG and Jagoda Munić of Zelena Akcija spoke about how their organizations earned their high reputation and visibility. Aida Bagić of MAP Consulting stressed the importance of distinguishing between various organizations registered according to the Croatian Law on Associations, a sentiment that was reinforced by Jagoda Munić. Namely, the law should differentiate between public benefit organizations and those non-profits which cater to the interests of their members. Sandra Ražnatović of Fade In explained some of the principles of short television reports, and explained that even 3-minute reports present a great opportunity for NGOs to present their work. (See the following article for more information and advice from Sandra Ražnatović on this topic.)

NGOS ON TELEVISION

Sandra Ražnatović (Fade In)



I think that there is still a great gap between the NGO sector and media, meaning that they do not know, understand or cooperate with each other. I do not know exactly the situation with other media (such as print media and radio), but I can say that television - and Croatian public television (HRT) is the one we cooperate with - basically does not perceive the NGO sector as an important factor in the development of society or as an active stakeholder in social and political processes in Croatia. Of course, in the last year, the television shows on HRT with the best ratings, such as “Latinica” or “Otvoreno”, featured guests from the NGO sector who are directly involved in the topic of the show, but these are, unfortunately, sporadic and rare cases, where the focus is always on the topic, so that the general public doesn’t really get information about the NGO’s activities, how it contributes to society, or how it works to solve a given problem.

During our cooperation with HRT over several years, we have produced and broadcast 400 reports about NGOs as part of the

“Good Morning, Croatia” show, and managed to connect the television team and NGO sector. Whereas at the beginning in 2000, we were the only ones doing reports on civil society issues, today almost all journalists in the team have their own contacts with NGOs dealing with issues such as ecology and protection of the environment, human rights, alternative youth culture, social capital or sustainable development. This shows that their perception of NGOs has changed from the previous ignorance and indifference to continual cooperation and constant involvement in addressing various social issues.

The duration of a real-time 30-minute speech is equivalent to three minutes on TV.

On the other hand, NGOs do not accept the fact that television is a specific medium with its own specific language. When arranging the filming of a report, NGO representatives often object that the duration of the report (3-5 minutes) is not enough to cover all aspects of the problem that their NGO is trying to solve. I agree with them, but the duration of a real-time 30-minute speech is equivalent to three minutes on TV. Television is a visual medium communicating primarily through pictures. It is worth mentioning that three minutes on “Good Morning, Croatia”, one of the shows with the best ratings in Croatia (4-6% - in comparison, the main news at 7:30 p.m. has a 16% rating), is a unique opportunity to inform the general public about the activities of the NGO. Often, a video clip only lasts 15-30 seconds, but the audience remembers it, recognizes it and reacts to it (for example, the clip “The one who beats you, does not love you” produced for B.a.B.e. in 2001, dealing with violence against women).

In the first few years of our cooperation with HRT, we mainly produced reports in which NGOs presented their projects and programs (“we are an NGO dealing with...”, “we founded the NGO because...”, “our goals are...”). This experience taught us how to present their work in a more interesting and dynamic way, so that today we focus on “activity”. When talking with NGO representatives about the shooting, we insist on filming the concrete activities of their members. For example, if the NGO deals with protection of the environment, we shoot some of their activities, such as workshops for making compost in primary schools in Opatija.

NGO representatives should themselves plan how to present their activities in the media. In accordance with that, presentations could be classified according to the specific characteristics of specific media, that is, to determine which events or activities are suitable for printed media (for example, results of round-tables, panel-discussions, petitions, and promotions of different

publications), and which require greater media support (for example, TV reports, spots or promotional movies). Some activities are visually interesting and therefore automatically more suitable for TV (such as planting trees with members of the local community, various educational and creative workshops, exhibitions, promotions with attractive programs, events, demonstrations, marches etc.).

TV shows have their basic rules and avoid repeating topics. In other words, an editor cannot broadcast report on the same topics within a short time period with the same speakers. However, one and the same topic can be presented in different ways, by showing different aspects or issues within the broad topic. For example, Fade In shot several reports about asylum, some focusing on the Croatian Law on Asylum, some on asylum seekers accommodated in shelters in Croatia, and others about the organization of an action carried out by activists who distributed leaflets and manuals on asylum at border crossings to official persons, who should give them to asylum seekers.

Video spots are also an effective way of promoting some activities of NGOs and it is possible to broadcast them on HRT free-of-charge. For example, we produced and received free airtime for a clip produced for B.a.B.e. in the framework of “16 days of Activism against Violence against Women” called “Stop Violence against Women”, a series of spots celebrating Volunteer Days for the former Office for Cooperation with NGOs, and a clip promoting citizens’ activism within the GRAK campaign.

NGOs need to become aware of the importance and, increasingly, necessity of presenting their activities in the media and include them into their project proposals to secure the necessary funding.

Our future activities will include the education of NGOs about how to present themselves in the media, and we will also educate the media about social commitment and importance of the civil sector. Since we are connected with both sides, we will do everything we can to overcome the existing gap between them.

The author works as a producer, editor and journalist in the NGO Fade In, which is primarily focused on video production. During their 5 years of work, Fade In has produced around 500 5-minute reports on civil society topics, around 60 episodes of the half-hour documentary “Direct”, and many socially committed educational and promotional films and clips for NGOs, campaigns and actions.

NOTE

The brochure “How to Communicate With the Local Media: a Guide for NGOs and Citizens’ Initiatives” (in Croatian), by Aleksandra Kuratko, produced as a result of cooperation between GONG and AED during the CroNGO Program is available at: http://www.aed.hr/hr/dokumenti/200404_media_booklet.pdf

HOW TO INCREASE VISIBILITY?

ACTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS

Sandra Pernar (GONG)



In today's information age, no organization of any importance can function without an active communication plan. However, in the non-profit sector, the need for good public relations is often considered secondary or is completely overlooked. Because of the specific conditions in which they work, NGOs are mostly focused on fund-raising and implementation of programs and projects, neglecting the value of coordinated public relations.

In the course of my work in GONG, I learned that it is very important for NGOs to establish an active public relations policy. Non-profit organizations provide services to individuals and communities with the aim of improving the quality of their lives, for which they need the help of volunteers, donations in time and money, and cooperation with decision-makers on different levels. In other words, their success depends largely on the degree of interest and knowledge of citizens. In order to grow and fulfill its mission, the organization's efforts must be focused on getting the opportunity to explain its mission to the public and present their attitudes, interests and activities in a positive light.

It is important for NGOs to pay enough attention and time to working with the media and maintaining contact with them, in order to be accepted as essential partners by them and achieve systematic media coverage.

It is true that nowadays, if something does not get in the media, it never happened, which means that NGOs have to fight for public attention. Many NGOs seem to think that sending press releases to the media and occasionally holding press conferences are an effective way of getting public support, whereas the truth is that it is only a small share of the necessary activities. In GONG, experience taught us that good media presentation of an organization is a result of a well thought out plan of action, accountability and expertise, and friendly relations with key journalists - in other words, constant openness to the media. If they do not work to get media attention, NGOs make their own work difficult. Good media relations can at the same time change attitudes within and outside the organization, cause social changes, increase membership and strengthen their finances.

In GONG's experience, for effective work it is necessary to plan a process through which the organization will present itself to

the public and create a positive image. Public relations that are limited to reactions in the media do not bring long-term benefits to the image and work of the organization. That is why it is important that all employees be aware of the value and effectiveness of an active, planned and focused media strategy and recognize potential media stories in their work. Passively waiting for the media to express interest in the organization can make the organization and its activities completely unknown to the public, because the media are certainly the main channel for reaching the public and without them, an organization will hardly become recognizable, regardless of its undoubtedly valuable work and commitment. Therefore it is important for NGOs to pay enough attention and time to working with the media and maintaining contact with them, in order to be accepted as essential partners by them and achieve systematic media coverage.

GONG was successful in this respect and has become an eminent social agent in Croatia, transforming itself from a citizens' initiative into a recognized and respected organization. Good public relations certainly contributed to that, not only in the sense of establishing media relations, but also providing information to the public through promotional materials and direct communication with citizens in our office, and through letters, e-mails and web pages. The key factor is the employees, because a creative and energetic team with the ability to promote the organization with different communicational resources can compensate for the lack of financial resources for that purpose. It is not necessary to emphasize how important quality and accountability are for an organization and that employees are familiar with the issue they work on. No public relations can make up for that, nor is it possible to develop them without these foundations. Therefore I believe that GONG's success can be achieved by other NGOs that work on achieving their mission and whose employees are ready to invest additional energy and time into developing media relations. Only certain "goods" are enough for success: good will, a good plan and a good story, with a little luck and a lot of persistence.

(The text was originally published in 2005 in Poslovni tjednik)

MEDIA COURAGE, CLEAR ARTICULATION AND CONTINUAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Suzana Kunac (B.a.B.e.)

Although small in terms of numbers, B.a.B.e. has managed to achieve greater visibility than other valuable and often larger NGOs. There are several key elements to the media strategy that we have systematically developed and used over the years:

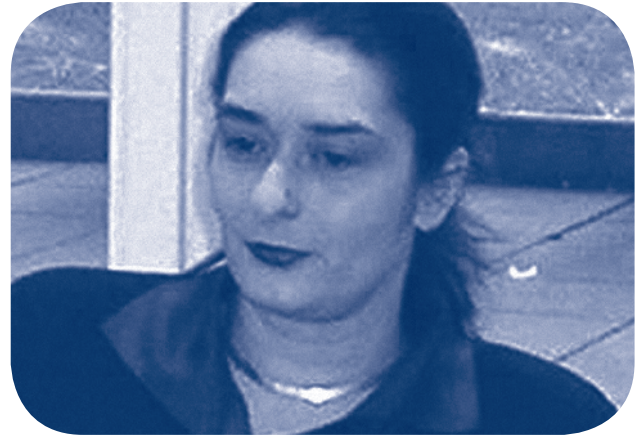
First, we have a quick procedure for sending out announcements, press releases or open letters, so that reactions are always timely and in accordance with the way the media function, entering the public debate when it is still intensive and interesting to the public. We do not waste time on long discussions, changing sentences, commas or expressions because media monitoring showed that they never publish the whole statement anyhow, but mostly retell and summarize it. It is important to state the basic attitude in two or three sentences, which is then elaborated in further public debate or written documents that pay more attention to content and form. All press releases are very short - never more than half a journalist card. By adopting this proactive approach, we try to influence and participate in shaping public opinion.

The second important element is being available to the media - open and willing to cooperate with journalists and respond to their numerous (and sometimes tiresome) requests: from collecting data for media reports to accepting invitations to radio and TV shows, almost always on short notice (most often immediately). This is the most demanding, but at the same time most important way to establish long-term cooperation with the media. We help journalists in return for their support.

In order to get long-term media attention and become attractive to the media and, as a result, visible in the public, it is necessary to use all forms available: from press releases and reactions, press conferences, different visually and thematically attractive events to thorough preparations for shows to which you are invited as a guest.

An important component of every successful public communication is familiarity with the various media forms and appropriate preparations for each of them. Writing statements and press releases differs from preparations for "Latinica" or a press conference or a public event we want the media to cover.

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to use all forms available: from press releases and reactions, press conferences, different visually and thematically attractive events to thorough preparations for shows to which you are invited as a guest.

As B.a.B.e is a lobbying and advocacy group, cooperation and communication with the media is an important element of our work because we use them as a means to achieve different goals - pressuring relevant institutions and mobilizing the public about an important issue. Since its founding, the members of the organization have had good communication with the media - they were leaders committed to the promotion of women's human rights, who boldly and clearly criticized certain social phenomena and were imagining and living different social relations - which gave them media and public credibility, as well as a high degree of accountability for the attitudes they advocate. In the long term, it is precisely media courage, clear articulation and continual media presence that allow trust to be built between NGOs and the media and public.

In the media workshops we conducted, it became clear to us that people have a fear of appearing in the media. It is important to overcome that fear because we are experts in the field we work in, and, besides, there is nothing to fear, given the superficiality and speed with which news is prepared and the lack of preparation on the part of the people we communicate with. If we prepare well, use our knowledge of media forms, improve our communication skills and educate ourselves about the way the media functions, we will easily gain the necessary confidence. It is important not to focus on the fear of what the media will show and how it will be presented, but on what statement we want to express in the public space and why.

Regardless of what we think about the media - their quality or coherence - without active participation we will not be able to change anything and our work will remain marginalized and undervalued.

OTHER RESEARCH AND STUDIES ON NGO VISIBILITY IN CROATIA (available in Croatian)

1 PERCEPTION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN CROATIA

This research on the perception of NGOs in Croatia was done by Agency PULS for B.a.B.e. in July 2002, as part of a previous CroNGO grant. The survey involved a sample of 800 citizens, who were interviewed by phone. Citizens were asked about their knowledge of the term NGO and to rank NGOs' success and influence in society, along with their readiness to become a member of an association. The research showed that only 57% of Croatian citizens had heard of or had some knowledge about NGOs. One-third of respondents think that NGOs' work is successful and only 2% of citizens stated that they are members of at least one NGO.

Results are available at www.babe.hr/istrazivanja/percepcijaNVO_BaBe.pdf.

In September 2004, after conducting the GRAK campaign to increase the visibility and influence of NGOs in society, B.a.B.e. and CESI contracted Agency PULS again to do similar research as in 2002. The research was done using the same methodology and questions as in 2002, but with a sample size of 600. The results showed some positive changes: 67% of citizens stated that they had heard of and had some knowledge about NGOs and 40% of citizens said that they think NGOs' work is successful. There were no significant changes in the percentage of people who are members of at least one organization - 3% stated that they are part of an NGO.

Results are available at www.cesi.hr/ReportPULS.doc.

2 ATTITUDES TOWARDS NGOS IN CROATIA

In April 2002, AED commissioned GfK to conduct a short survey to determine general attitudes towards NGOs in Croatia. The survey consisted of 12 questions and involved a sample of 1,000 respondents. The first set of questions was aimed at determining general knowledge about NGOs. Results were quite different than in the research done by B.a.B.e. - 97% of citizens claimed to have heard of the term NGO, but the research didn't verify if they knew the meaning of the term. The report also showed that GONG, HVIDR-a, B.a.B.e., HHO and Caritas are the most visible non-governmental organizations in Croatia. The second group of questions examined attitudes towards NGOs. 61% of citizens stated that they think NGOs' work is good for society and 31% had a neutral opinion of their work. The third group of questions examined the biggest problems in Croatia and possible solutions.

Results are available at www.aed.hr/hr/dokumenti/200204_gfk_survey.pdf.

3 CIVICUS' CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX

During 2002, CERANEO (Center for Development of Civil Society Organizations) participated in the CIVICUS - World Alliance for Citizen Participation pilot global research about the development of civil society organizations, known as the Civil Society Index (CSI). A broader version of the CSI was conducted in Croatia in May 2005. CIVICUS uses a unique, participatory methodology to assess the structure, impact, values and environment of civil society at the national level and is currently used in more than 50 countries around the world.

Results are available at www.ceraneo.hr/C_ICDH_0305.zip.

AED'S NGO SECTOR VISIBILITY PROGRAM



AWARDED GRANTS

Part of AED's CroNGO Program is the NGO Sector Visibility Program, which aims to increase recognition and understanding of and public support to NGOs that contribute to democratic and economic development. Within this Program, AED has awarded 7 grants to projects aimed at better presenting the work of NGOs to the general public and informing them about the ways that NGOs contribute to improving the quality of life in society.

- >> **B.a.B.e.** is conducting research on the contributions of NGOs on democratic and decision-making processes on the national level. Results of the research will be disseminated through the media and other channels and presented to various stakeholders.
- >> **CESI and partners** have prepared, in cooperation with the production company 4Film, a 35-minute documentary in which activists from the NGO sector explain why they are active in NGOs. A promotional campaign and screenings in six cities (Rijeka, Split, Pula, Zagreb, Vukovar, Osijek), accompanied by public discussions on the influence and work of NGOs, will be held during February and March 2006.
- >> **Domine and Cenzura** will present the NGO sector and its contribution to the development of society to the general public through 12 one-hour TV shows. These special issues of the TV show "Cenzura" will be broadcast once a month on TV Jadran and Kanal Ri, as well as OTV. The project also includes workshops for NGO representatives on cooperation with the media, and for media representatives and journalists on the NGO sector.
- >> **Fade In** is preparing 22 television reports about the NGO sector, which are broadcast on the popular HRT 1 shows "Good Morning, Croatia" and "Life Live". At the end of the project, all reports will be published on DVD and widely distributed.
- >> **Center for Peace Studies and the Association for Independent Media Culture**, in cooperation with Radio 101, are preparing a radio show called "Civildreta" dedicated to the activities and role of NGOs, and publishing its contents and additional materials on the independent web-portal "H-Alter" (www.h-alter.org). "Civildreta" will be broadcast every other Tuesday at 19:00 on Radio 101 from January to June 2006, and articles on "H-Alter" will continue to be published until December 2006.
- >> **PRONI** will inform citizens about the role of NGOs in society in the four largest cities in Vukovarsko-srijemska County through radio shows, information booths, a promotional campaign, a newsletter, NGO fairs and workshops. Research on public attitudes towards NGOs will be conducted at the beginning and end of the project.
- >> **ZaMirNET** will continue publishing its e-zine "ZaMirZINE" (www.zamirzine.net) dealing with everyday activities of NGOs, civil society issues and promoting participatory journalism that involves citizens into news production.